



Government of  
South Australia

# Energy and mining on the **Limestone Coast**

Social research findings  
and recommendations



DEMI



“This report is the first step in our journey to be more proactive in relation to community engagement and ensure our communities feel heard, respected, and treated fairly.”

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# BACKGROUND

This report details the findings from a pilot social research study conducted in June–July 2024. The study aimed to understand the experiences and attitudes of Limestone Coast residents who have been impacted by the industries regulated by the Department for Energy and Mining.

This study focused on the Limestone Coast because of an increase in mineral exploration activities over recent years. It is an area with multiple well-established industries, complex social and environmental landscapes, and plays a critical role in the state’s food production and GDP contribution.

As we transition into a low carbon future, it is critical that the state understands the ability of mining and energy projects to coexist with other industries and close to established communities.

This study aims to understand the attitudes of community members who have been or may in future be impacted by mining or energy projects, as well as the associated risks for DEM and industry.

The objectives of this project were to:

ensure community perspective are being heard and responded to

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understand whether communities understand their rights and have access to the information they need

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gain insights into the level of trust communities afford DEM to effectively regulate and therefore mitigate or manage any perceived risks from mining or energy industry operations in their area

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inform DEM's assessment and regulation teams on how best to regulate projects from a social perspective

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# SURVEY AREA MAP



highlight key issues at play for current operations, perceived issues from future projects, and cumulative impacts

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inform DEM on how to design communication, education, and engagement strategies for communities and the state using an evidence-based, social licence to operate and risk communication approach

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uncover what stakeholders value about their communities and regions, and how mining and energy projects have impacted, or may impact in the future, the things that matter to them

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give clear and evidence-based guidance to proponents on the social impacts and community expectations we expect them to manage and that we will be regulating against.

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DEM is the lead agency for most regulation under the *Mining Act 1971*, *Energy Resources Act 2000* and *Hydrogen and Renewable Energy Act 2023*. Each legislation is regulated using a tailored process and framework that varies based on the targeted resource and project stage.

Other state government agencies and regulators operate in a co-regulatory environment, providing comment and input into regulatory assessment. These agencies include the South Australian Environment Protection Authority (EPA), Department for Environment and Water (DEW), Primary Industries and Resources South Australia (PIRSA) and Department for Infrastructure and Transport (DIT).

This survey has highlighted the importance for DEM to proactively seek input from impacted communities and to build relationships, especially in areas that are the subject of recent energy and mining interest.

DEM acknowledges that its approach to date has been insufficient to allay the concerns of some community members. We need to ensure local voices are heard, not only during specific consultation and assessment processes, but throughout the entire lifecycle of any, even potential, energy and mining projects.

It is clear from the research findings that current approaches to information sharing and engagement about some mining and energy activities on the Limestone Coast have left many community members feeling uncertain and concerned about the future of their region. They are also uncertain where to turn for assistance and reliable information.

This report is a key step on our journey to be more proactive about community engagement. We want to ensure our communities feel heard, respected, and treated fairly.

Our belief is that The Mining Act's outcome-based regulatory approach provides space for proactive regulation through transparency, leading indicators, scoping provisions, social impact assessments (SIAs) and environmental impact assessments (EIA). This is increasingly evident with modern approvals and contemporary legislation.

This suite of regulatory tools and approaches, if implemented effectively, could alleviate many community concerns. The recommendations and commitments in this report aim to help address the concerns we heard from the community and interested stakeholders.

## HOW TO GIVE US MORE FEEDBACK

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We have established a webpage and email address for ongoing communication and feedback from interested stakeholders across the region. This is to make sure we have accurately captured existing concerns and any others that may arise, and that our actions going forward help reduce uncertainty for residents.

If you have any concerns, feedback on this report or suggestions for future improvements please feel free to email:

[LimestoneCoastCommunity@sa.gov.au](mailto:LimestoneCoastCommunity@sa.gov.au)

**For more information visit:**

[energyandmining.sa.gov.au/LimestoneCoast](https://energyandmining.sa.gov.au/LimestoneCoast)

Sign up to receive news and updates as well as invitations to future research in the area via this link.



# RECOMMENDATIONS AND DEM COMMITMENTS

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The majority (92%) of respondents who we heard from during this research were primarily focused on exploration and mining projects. As such the recommendations and commitments detailed in this section are weighted

to address concerns related to these project types. However, any operator, regardless of resource type or project stage, should consider the following recommendations when making decisions about their projects.

## RECOMMENDATION 1 – SCOPING

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Given the Limestone Coast's importance to South Australia, the complexity of the region's social, environmental and economic landscapes, and the feedback we have received from the community as part of this research, any proponent seeking to operate on the Limestone Coast should undertake scoping as early in their project as practicable.

We believe that both impacted stakeholders and the proponent would greatly benefit from undertaking scoping. DEM would therefore expect any proponent to clearly articulate any rationale about why they feel it would not be appropriate for their project.

Scoping ensures that communities are engaged early to provide their input and provides them with greater transparency into the ongoing processes. It also offers companies the opportunity to ensure that DEM's assessment of their application is proportionate to the project's potential






environmental impacts. It supports a more proactive and collaborative approach to project design and allows companies to work through any community concerns more proactively and transparently ahead of drafting an application.

For companies undertaking scoping in this region, the process will take account of this research project's findings, particularly the issues and recommendations outlined in this report.

### **About the scoping process**

As outlined in Part 10 of the Mining Regulations 2020, scoping is not a mandatory requirement but is voluntary for most projects. However, the Minister may determine that scoping is required if a project is likely to have complex environmental or social interactions, including potential for an accredited assessment under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth).

Scoping is especially strongly encouraged when a project is likely to include:

|   |   |
|---|---|
|    | complex or unclear environmental impacts          |
|    | complex socio-cultural matters                    |
|    | high environmental sensitivities                  |
|  | the application of new technologies or approaches |
|  | the application of multiple laws                  |

The scoping process for a proposed operation involves five main steps:

1. Preliminary impact assessment
2. Preliminary impact assessment meeting
3. Draft scoping report
4. Department for Energy and Mining review
5. Final scoping report

It is recommended that scoping is done as early as possible during conceptual development (feasibility and options analysis). The final scoping report will form a project-specific terms of reference against which the tenement application or change in operations application must comply and will be assessed.

DEM will Gazette and publish the final scoping report. This is designed to help stakeholders understand the proposed operation, where they will have opportunities to provide input, and how that input will be incorporated into the application and impact assessment.

This process also offers companies additional opportunities to demonstrate responsiveness to community concerns and increase transparency by voluntarily sharing information with their stakeholders, as well as engaging directly on certain aspects of the process.

More information about scoping is available at [Scoping | Energy & Mining \(energymining.sa.gov.au\)](https://energymining.sa.gov.au)

## RECOMMENDATION 2 – SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT (SIA)

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Given concerns raised by the community during the survey process about mining's potential impacts, any company involved in advanced exploration activities for any resource type should undertake a social impact assessment (SIA) as early as practicable. To learn more about SIAs you can read DEM's guidance paper: [MG45 An introduction to social impact assessment \(pir.sa.gov.au\)](https://pir.sa.gov.au)

This will ensure that prospective operators can demonstrate that they understand and acknowledge the views and/or concerns of impacted community members about how activities may impact their way of life. It will therefore allow them to develop and apply suitable risk mitigation strategies.

It is possible that companies could demonstrate a robust understanding of the social context of the area of interest without undertaking a full SIA. For example, if a robust SIA is publicly available from another company or institution in the same area, or if the area of interest is remote and has limited social impacts. All cases should be discussed as early as possible with DEM to determine the suitability of various approaches, given their social setting. This discussion will take place during the discussions with DEM as part of Recommendation 1 – Scoping.

To learn more about SIAs you can read DEM's guidance paper: [MG45 An introduction to social impact assessment \(pir.sa.gov.au\)](https://pir.sa.gov.au)

## RECOMMENDATION 3 – COMMUNITY CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES

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Proponents should seek to establish community consultative committees (CCC) as early as possible in any proposed exploration or mining operations.

CCCs should be established with a formalised and published Terms of Reference document that outlines committee members' roles and responsibilities, meeting frequencies, minute-taking commitments, an independent Chair, and agreed evaluation frequencies and criteria.

Consultative committees should focus on collaboration, transparency, shared decision-making, information-sharing, and the equal empowerment of all members, as facilitated by the Chair.

Committee membership should be governed by the Terms of Reference. It should be representative of community interests, subject to review and voluntary.

As well as representatives of the proponent company, CCC membership may include, for example:

**landowners**

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**local residents**

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**impacted industry stakeholders**

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**state government representatives**

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**local government representatives**

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**subject matter experts.**

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Regulators and subject matter experts are often non-members but are invited to participate in specific sessions at the members' request via the Chair.

CCC meetings should always have thorough, accurate meeting minutes, which allow a broader audience to understand how issues are being addressed to allay concerns. This also builds trust in the process. Meeting minutes should be published on the proponent's and/or a CCC specific website, in a timely manner.

Active CCCs in South Australia are detailed here: [Mining compliance | Energy & Mining \(energymining.sa.gov.au\)](#)

## RECOMMENDATION 4 – ISSUES REGISTER

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If there is uncertainty about potential impacts, proponents should focus on understanding the issues of concern. A robust scoping and SIA process should help with this process – see Recommendation 1 – Scoping and Recommendation 2 – Social impact assessment (SIA).

However, to ensure transparency and easy access to relevant information, proponents should publish a risks/issues register and keep it up to date. This register should include concerns raised by the community, indicate how issues raised will be addressed and demonstrate how they relate to or will be managed through relevant legislation or regulations.

Multiple relevant government agencies and pieces of legislation may be relevant to any given issue, such as the extractives industry, HRE, environmental protection, public health or workplace safety.

The issues register should be updated regularly and thoroughly. Engagement activities should focus on working with concerned stakeholders to understand and resolve issues. If a community consultative committee or reference group has been established, the risk/issues register should be reviewed at committee meetings, actions defined, and outcomes published with the meeting minutes. This should be done in a timely manner and made easily accessible on the company's website.

More information can be found in:

MG31 [Engagement, negotiating, and agreement-making](#)

MG34 [Preparing a community engagement plan](#)

MG41 [Leading practice engagement](#)

## RECOMMENDATION 5 - **TRANSPARENCY**

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Community members' uncertainty about how energy and mining projects could impact them can create concern and anxiety. This is especially true in areas that have historically not been significantly impacted by these industries, or when potential projects will include new technology or extractive practices.

To reduce undue mental health burdens and time required to find information, it is recommended that proponents publish information about an operations' size, location and scope, as quickly as

possible. They should include information about potential extractive practices, examples of previous use, rationales for selecting these methods, and links to useful sources of information such as the Department for Energy and Mining, Department for Environment and Water, Department for Infrastructure and Transport and the EPA. Where relevant, community members should be made aware of and know how to contact the free, factual and impartial Landowner Information Service.



# DEM'S COMMITMENTS

When energy and mining projects impact an area, especially an area with minimal historical precedence, there is a burden put on those communities.

They feel they need to learn about the project's potential impacts and how impacts will be managed. They also need to understand their rights and where to find accurate, independent information.

These issues have become apparent through this research. To address this going forward, DEM is committing to:

- ✓ Establish a focused webpage bringing together relevant information and resources for interested Limestone Coast stakeholders, including research findings, commitments, community questions/concerns, responses from DEM or relevant companies, and frequently asked questions.

- ✓ Establish a register of interested stakeholders to keep informed of progress against DEM's commitments outlined in this report.  
([DEM.Engagement@sa.gov.au](mailto:DEM.Engagement@sa.gov.au))

- ✓ Review and ensure all available information on [www.energymining.gov.sa.au](http://www.energymining.gov.sa.au) is up to date, easily accessible and written in plain English. This includes information about exploration and mining, the regulatory process, land access, community engagement, environmental bonds, and rehabilitation requirements for proponents. Community members should be able to easily find and understand information that relates to their specific situation, and rights, as well as the protections in place to mitigate and manage potential impacts from energy and mining projects. The focused webpage and direct email address will assist community members to find the information they need, or to contact DEM for further clarification or feedback.



Increase staff presence in impacted communities to ensure availability of staff for community members and stakeholders. Given the high response rates and level of interest from the Naracoorte area, DEM will initially explore options to have officers based in the town on a regular basis. They will be available to meet with community members who have questions or concerns about any energy or mining-related activities. DEM will also work with local government authorities to monitor interest from other parts of the Limestone Coast and adjust the approach as required.



Increase transparency for the public about how mineral tenement holders demonstrate compliance with the Mining Act and approved programs.

Tenement holders are required to provide compliance reports within two months of the anniversary date of the tenement or at an agreed date where the report can cover multiple tenements.



Compliance reports are already publicly available by request from interested parties. However, DEM is committed to making these reports more accessible and will ensure they are available from the Mining Register ([Mining Register | Energy & Mining \(energymining.sa.gov.au\)](https://energymining.sa.gov.au)).

Ensure that concerns raised through this survey are factored into our approach to the ongoing compliance monitoring of existing operations and assessment of any applications for future operations in the region.

Proponents are required at various stages to identify and address 'environmental objectives', which are usually an operation's known risk factors. This includes both environmental and social factors. This research has uncovered specific risk factors (key issues) that will now need to be understood and addressed by proponents operating in the region.

The following documents and webpages are available if you wish to read more about how we regulate, particularly in relation to mineral exploration:

- [MG22 Mineral exploration PEPRs and compliance](#)
- [Community guide to early and advanced exploration activities in South Australia](#)
- [Mineral exploration and land access](#)



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Conduct similar social research in the region within 12 months of publishing this report. Community sentiments and relationships with industry and government can and do change over time.

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Given the complexity of the social and environmental landscape on the Limestone Coast, evolving interests and technologies of industries operating in the area, and the recommendations and commitments in this report, future research will be designed to understand:

- changes in community sentiment towards local projects
- the effectiveness of the recommendation and commitments in this report to address community needs
- changing circumstances in the region.

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This research may be a standalone piece of work similar to this research project or combined with a broader piece of work to capture sentiments from additional locations (dependent on perceived requirements).

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# RESEARCH **METHODOLOGY**



## SURVEY METHODS

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The research for this pilot study focused on understanding social attitudes towards DEM and the resource industry on the Limestone Coast (as defined by Regional Development Australia). It aims to ensure the government uses the most effective, material approach to industry regulation with the area's social context in mind.

The research included a short online survey containing open-ended and quantitative questions. A full copy of the survey can be found here. Community members were also able to submit written comments directly to DEM. Several community members were interviewed face to face or on phone/online video calls.

DEM invited key stakeholders, identified by DEM staff and industry networks, to respond to the survey directly. DEM also advertised online (paid and organic) and in print media. The survey was discussed in local publications and on radio programs in response to organic media interest in the project.

The survey link and related advertising collateral was made available for interested community members and stakeholders to share through their own networks and social media channels. It was live on [www.YourSAy.sa.gov.au](http://www.YourSAy.sa.gov.au) for 7 weeks (20 May - 8 July 2024).

## WHO WE HEARD FROM

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In total 159 members of the Limestone Coast community responded to the survey through a mix of online survey completions and one-on-one interviews.

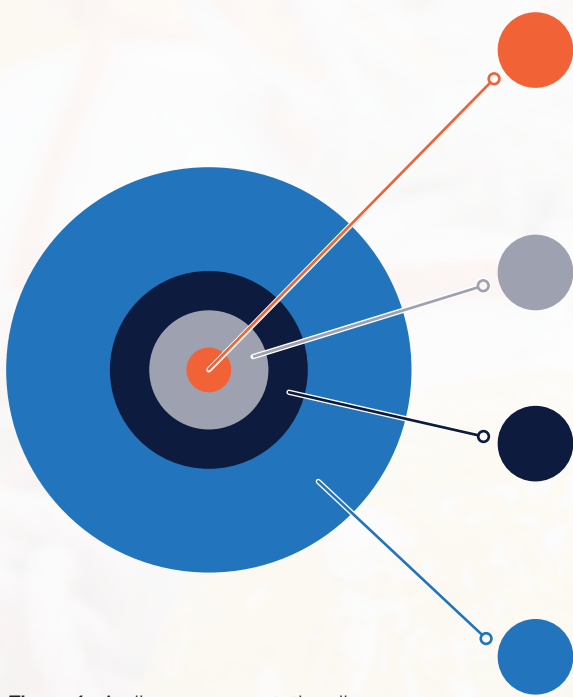
When asked to "Please tell us a bit about how you are impacted by mining or energy projects in your area. Include details of specific projects or companies that you are impacted by or interested in." more than 92% of respondents indicated interest in minerals exploration and mining projects, with a smaller percentage (5%) mentioning issues related to natural gas exploration/projects. As such the

focus, of the recommendations and commitments detailed below, is on mineral exploration and mining in the region. However, these recommendations should influence the decision-making of any operator regardless of resource type or project stage.

Given the research design and focus on the most impacted and interested members of the community, the results are heavily weighted to represent the views of the Highly Involved (77%) and Attentive (20%) community members and stakeholders in the region (See Figure 2).

**159**  
members





**Highly involved**

The highly involved group are the most impacted and interested group, typically oppositional and make a relatively small percentage of the total population. This group is characterised by high levels of interest, concern, motivation to seek out information, and levels of knowledge on the topic being discussed.

**Attentives**

Attentives generally have an active interest in the issue, they will follow the public debate and will actively see out information. They are often guided by the views and experiences of the highly involved group.

**Browsers**

Browsers are those with a passive interest in the issues. They will move into the Attentive group if their passing interest drivers are not satisfactorily met when they happen across information. They are unlikely to actively engage with the debate therefore ensuring the messaging coming from the two more central groups needs to be addressed and shared publicly.

**General Public**

The silent majority. Unlikely to engage on the issue, generally disinterested and unmotivated to act in opposition to an issue. This group also includes supporters of the issue/project in question.

Figure 1 Audience segmentation diagram

**Audience segmentation: Highly involved to general public**

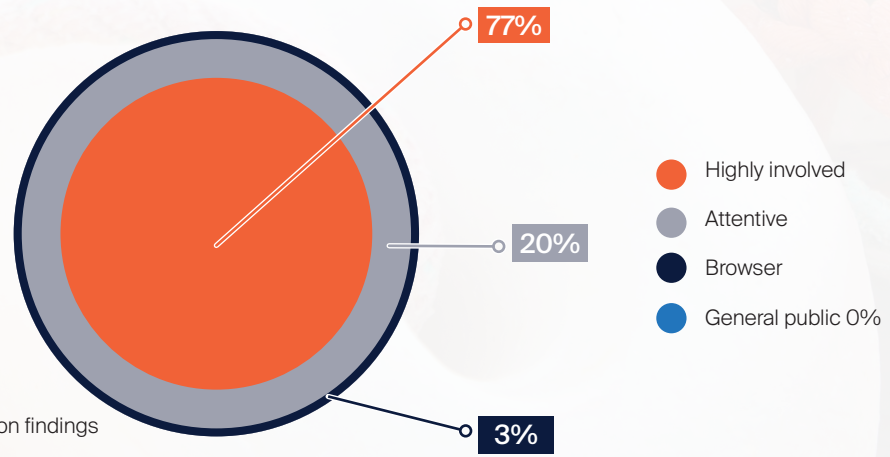
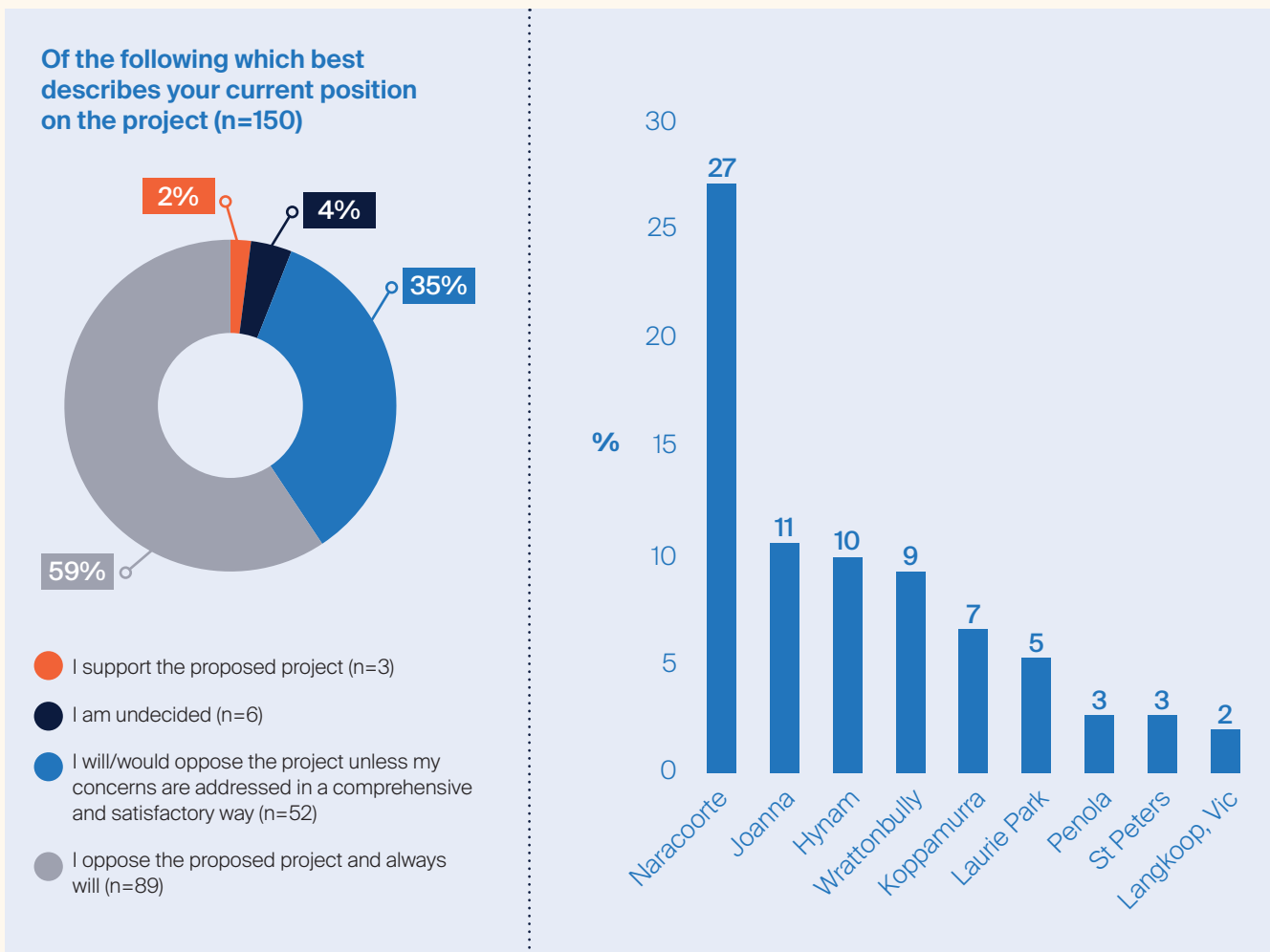


Figure 2 Respondent segmentation findings

# KEY FINDINGS

As expected, most respondents oppose (are against) energy and mining projects in their area. The chart below shows the level of support for or opposition towards energy and mining projects that have directly impacted respondents.

While there was a wide geographical spread of respondents, including those who do not come from the Limestone Coast, most respondents live in Naracoorte and the areas immediately adjacent to the south and east.



**Figure 3** Level of support for local energy and mining projects

**Figure 4** Chart showing where respondents live (more than one respondent)

## Suburbs with only one respondent

|              |              |               |            |               |            |
|--------------|--------------|---------------|------------|---------------|------------|
| Adelaide     | Comaum       | Glenroy       | Keppoch    | Lucindale     | Rostrevor  |
| Apsley, Vic  | Cooke Plains | Hardwicke Bay | Kongorong  | Mount Gambier | Spence     |
| Avenue Range | Coonawarra   | Kalangadoo    | Kybybolite | Moyhall       | Thornlea   |
| Binnun       | Fullarton    | Keith         | Lockleys   | Padthaway     | Woolumbool |
| Blackford    | Glencoe West | Kensington    | Lowan Vale | Robe          |            |

# WHAT CONCERNED RESPONDENTS?

The survey asked several open-ended questions and provided open text boxes for answers. There were no word limits, which allowed respondents to write as much detail as they liked.

The questions included:

If you are, or have previously been, involved in any formal engagement/consultation process for this project, can you please describe your involvement below?

Do you feel the project has or would affect the way of life in your community?

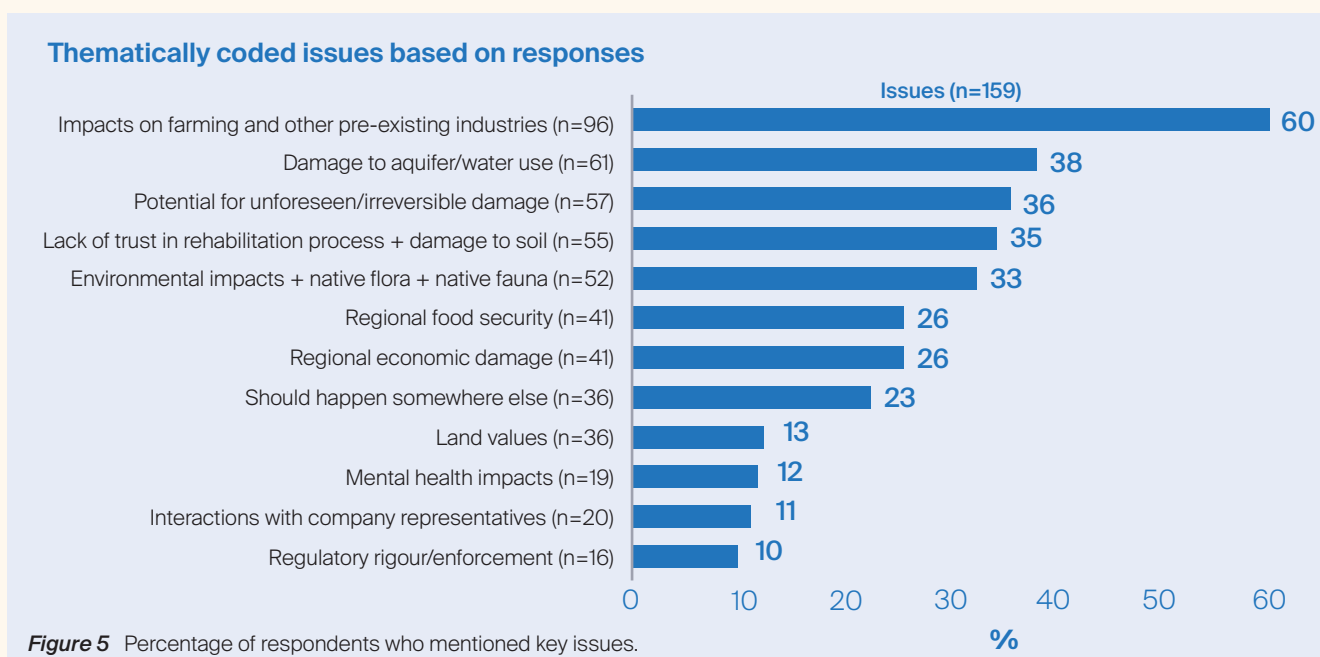
When thinking about the project, what is it that concerns you?

Why are you concerned about that/those issues?

What do you think the potential benefits of the project are/could be for the local area or South Australia as a whole?

Is there anything else you think the Department for Energy and Mining should know, or consider, as part of their thinking around this project?

The responses to these questions were thematically coded to identify 'Issues'.



The following sections of the report will focus on the most material issues flagged by respondents - those mentioned by more than 10% of the total sample. This approach allows DEM to provide a focused response to the most material issues.

The less frequently mentioned issues remain important and have helped shape the recommendations and commitments in this report (see Figure 6). These issues will also be captured in our thinking and approach to the implementation and monitoring of the recommendations and commitments.

| Issues   | Mentions - % of total sample (n = 159) |
|--|--|
| Impacts on farming and other pre-existing industries     | 60%                                    |
| Potential for unforeseen/irreversible damage             | 36%                                    |
| Lack of trust in rehabilitation process + Damage to soil | 35%                                    |
| Environmental impacts + Native flora + Native fauna      | 33%                                    |
| Regional economic damage                                 | 26%                                    |
| Regional food security                                   | 26%                                    |
| Should happen somewhere else                             | 23%                                    |
| Land values  | 13%                                    |
| Mental health impacts                                    | 12%                                    |
| Interactions with company representatives                | 11%                                    |
| Regulatory rigour/enforcement                            | 10%                                    |
| Caves + Heritage   | 9%                                     |
| Type of mining   | 9%                                     |
| Pressure on community/local infrastructure               | 9%                                     |
| Risking 'Clean and Green' reputation                     | 9%                                     |
| Long-term planning and investments                       | 8%                                     |
| Air pollution/dust                                       | 5%                                     |
| Short-term gains vs long-term risks                      | 4%                                     |
| Impacting future farming                                 | 3%                                     |

**Figure 6** Percentage of respondents who mentioned each issue.



# KEY ISSUES

This section of the report will detail the concerns raised by at least 10% of respondents. It refers to the recommendations and commitments listed above where relevant.



## IMPACTS ON FARMING AND OTHER PRE-EXISTING INDUSTRIES (60%)

Unsurprisingly, considering the predominant land use and population in the study area, particularly in and around the Naracoorte area, the most mentioned issue was the current or future impacts of mining on farmers and related industries.

“Affected landholders may be financially compensated, but this takes in little consideration to the plethora of businesses where these landholders have previously spent their money. [Local saleyards] will have reduced numbers, local livestock agents being significantly affected. Years of breeding stock will be lost as affected land holders reduce the number of livestock held. Rural products stores will have reduced spends, with lower livestock numbers and areas being used for crops and pastures. Machinery sales and maintenance providers will be affected. If a farmer receives a lease payment, are they going to be spending money at any of these stores?”

“Firstly, evidence from close by in the Wimmera and the Murray Mallee. Apart of the devastation to the land and lives of people living on it. this project will impact the timber Industry plus the farming Industry which the region is not just known for...it's famous for! It is yet to be proven that the soils having been dug up and mixed up, plus had the carbon and some nutrients removed or destroyed in the process, can be put back the way it was. The productivity of the land will be significantly diminished fore ever.”

“...loss of farm land, in some cases permanent, will reduce employment both directly on the land but also in the many support industries and businesses in Naracoorte and surrounds. The whole character of the town may change.”

“Farmers spend their whole life protecting and improving the land for the next generation to continue and the next generation after that. Mining is the antithesis of that culture.”

“The Limestone Coast is a powerhouse for the SA Government - one of the state's highest value primary production areas. GDP of agriculture, forestry, and fishing for the Limestone Coast in 21/22 was 46% of the state's total sector GDP. Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries accounts for more than 37% of businesses in the Limestone Coast.”\*

\* Statements made by survey respondents have been quoted verbatim as such, any opinions, facts, or figures quoted represent their views and opinions and are not necessarily verified statistics.

**“Beef and dairy cattle, prime lambs, softwood and hardwood, vegetables, small seeds, one of Australia’s finest wine regions are all under threat by mining.”**

Respondents were particularly concerned about the impact mining in the area would have on their ability to continue farming. Concerns related to disturbed ground losing productivity, reputational damage to areas known as ‘Clean and Green’, lost opportunities for future generations of farmers, difficulty in making investment/business planning decisions due to uncertainty about potential mining operations, and potential damage to land values.

Respondents’ comments on this issue demonstrated a consistent sense that mining companies have little understanding and respect for farmers in the region. They indicate the sense that mining and farming communities have very different perspectives on what an acceptable vision for the area’s future should/could be, and that it is unfair to impose mining on longstanding existing communities who are not receptive to it.

**Relevant recommendations:**

**Recommendation 1** – Scoping

**Recommendation 2** – Social impact assessment (SIA).





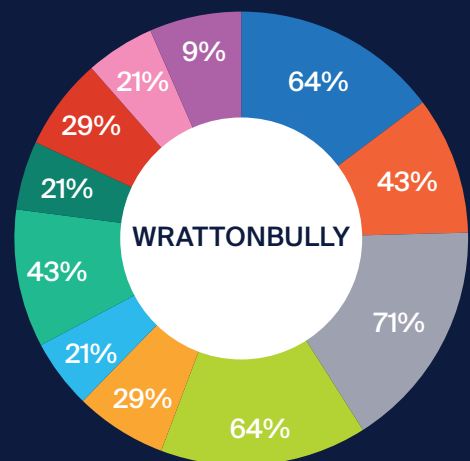
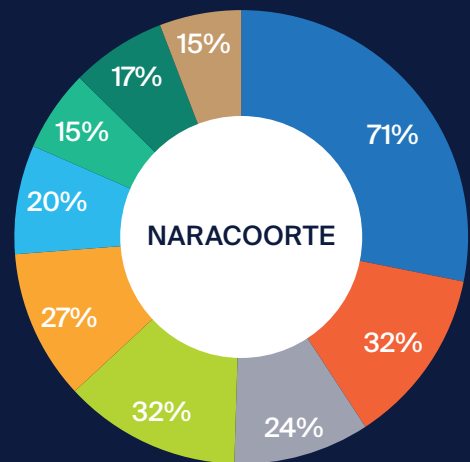
## DAMAGE TO AQUIFER/LACK OF AVAILABLE WATER (38%)

The second most often mentioned issue was concern about potential impacts to the region's aquifer/ground water.

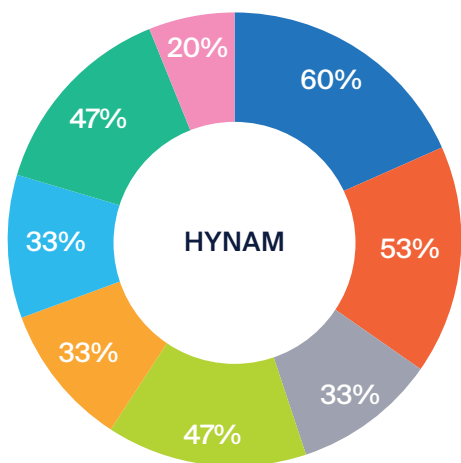
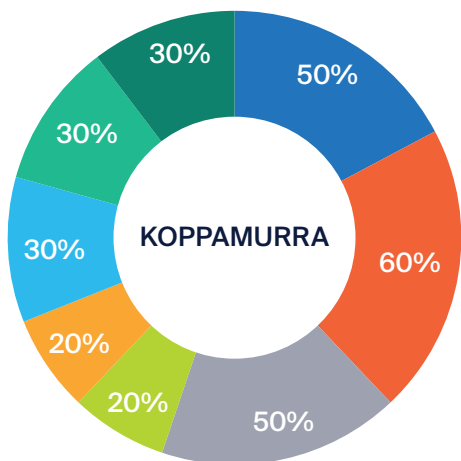
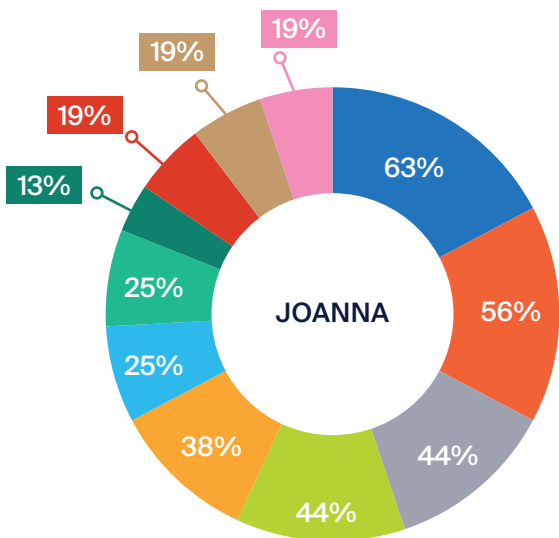
“The Limestone Coast is extraordinarily rare and unique with both confined and unconfined aquifers. For farmers and all producers, the extraction of water from the unconfined aquifer is restricted by license, which was applied due to increasing salinity. Any further extraction will simply return us to this problem. It has been corrected by farmers and producers by limiting their usage.”

“The extraction of [minerals] will require large volumes of water. It will also require use of a large amount of toxic chemicals. The recharge of the unconfined aquifer occurs from surface water so clearly, any contamination of this will be transferrable to the aquifer. Leakage of contaminated surface water into the aquifer would be inevitable. Once disturbed through an invasive mining process, the topsoil is likely to leach into the porous limestone also. Surface water such as creeks, dams, swaps, waterholes etc would become silted up as the soil structure after mining would be unstable.”

“Can low pH acid be contained & not infiltrate the soil and damage the limestone base or aquifer? The high value agricultural & forestry assets in the region could be put at risk with unproven mining techniques.”



Overall, this issue was mentioned by 38% of respondents. However, in Joanna and Hyman it was mentioned by more than 40% of respondents, and in Wrattobully 64%.



There is a close correlation between the number of respondents mentioning potential aquifer impacts and those mentioning potential for unforeseen/irreversible impacts, lack of trust in the rehabilitation process and damage to soil.

The comments made it clear that concerns are mainly related to perceptions that any aquifer impacts could be irreversible and potentially catastrophic to the surrounding environment, neighbouring landowners, and businesses. Additionally, the community lacks trust in and/or understanding about how potential risks to the aquifer are addressed and managed in relevant legislation.

A mining or energy project can only go ahead if the operator can demonstrate that they will manage and minimise all impacts on the environment, including water, during and after operations.

A detailed Scoping approach will help to define the issues and the mitigation approaches required before any project can be approved. It will also increase the visibility of the level of scrutiny and rigour applied by DEM throughout the assessment and approvals process for any project to detail such concerns and ensure adequate mitigations are in place before progressing,

**Relevant recommendations:**  
 Recommendation 1 – Scoping  
 Recommendation 4 – Issues register

- Impacts on farming and other pre-existing industries (n=96)
- Damage to aquifer
- Lack of trust in rehabilitation process + Damage to soil (n=55)
- Regional economic damage (n=41)
- Should happen somewhere else (n=36)
- Mental health impacts (n = 19)
- Type of mining (n = 15)
- Potential for unforeseen/irreversible damage (n=57)
- Environmental impacts + Native flora + Native fauna (n=52)
- Regional food security (n = 41)
- Land values (n = 36)
- Interactions with company representatives (n = 20)

Figure 7 Issues by suburb.



## POTENTIAL FOR UNFORESEEN/IRREVERSIBLE DAMAGE (36%)

The third most mentioned issue across the total sample was 'Potential for unforeseen/irreversible damage'. This was much more frequently mentioned by survey respondents who lived in Koppamurra (60%), Joanna (56%) and Hyman (53%).

“Irreparable damage to our agricultural land. There has been a lot of talk around replacing the minerals back into the soil, but little regard given to all the precious soil carbon that would be lost in the mining process - carbon that has taken millennia to build. Equally important is the impact on beneficial soil organisms such as fungi, bacteria, beneficial nematodes, and earthworms.”

“It will destroy the whole area. We are all 100% dependant on the aquifer. A 'mistake' on one farm will impact the aquifer throughout the whole region.”

“We don't know the truth and how it will impact the landowners and the environment.”

“The risks to the environment, aquifer and site rehabilitation aren't fully understood or explained to the community.”

This issue was closely correlated to mentions of other related issues as shown in Figure 8. The chart shows the percentage of those who mentioned both this issue and another issue. For example, everyone who mentioned 'Potential for unforeseen/irreversible damage', also mentioned 'Damage to the aquifer' (74%).

This issue indicates a lack of trust in, or understanding of, the safeguards in place to protect the environment and community from undue negative impacts from operations. One of DEM's critical roles is to ensure communities know their rights and understand exploration and operations processes for mining and energy projects.

The number of respondents referring to this issue highlights that DEM needs to review and improve the information we make available about the regulatory process and how we engage with communities. See **DEM's commitments** for our actions.

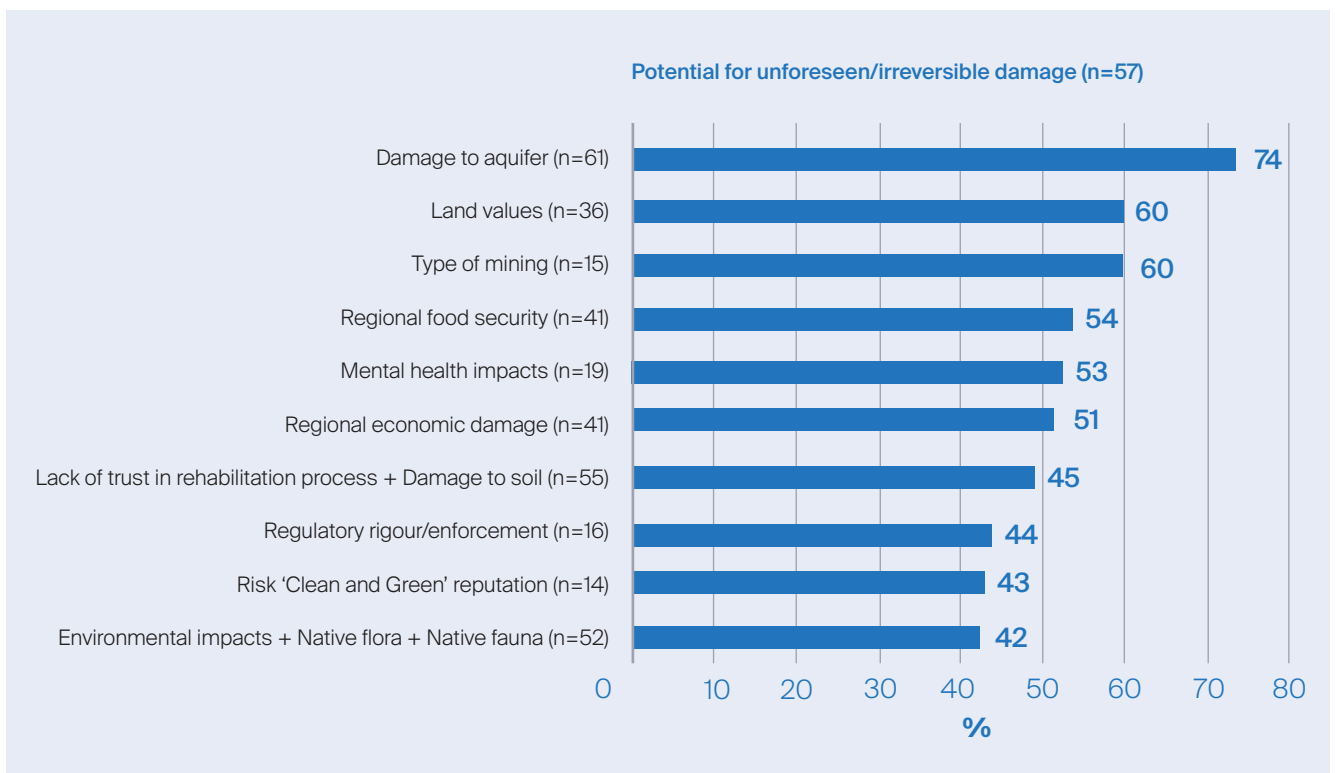
**Relevant recommendations:**

**Recommendation 1** – Scoping

**Recommendation 3** – Community consultative committees

**Recommendation 4** – Issues register

**Recommendation 5** - Transparency



**Figure 8** Percentage of respondents who mentioned 'Potential for unforeseen/irreversible damage' and other issues.



## LACK OF TRUST IN REHABILITATION PROCESS/ DAMAGE TO SOIL (35%)

Due to the Limestone Coast's high levels of farming, forestry and viticulture, there is an unsurprisingly significant level of interest in, and scrutiny around, the impact any mining activities would have on the soil, and whether rehabilitation would be able to return the land to pre-disturbance quality and productivity.

“There has been no evidence-based research that guarantees the land will be returned to its current state. The company is relying on the fact that current landowners will be dead by the time rehabilitation process takes place. This land has been so reliable and productive for so many years for a reason and the farmers rely on this.”

“How much will soil structure and fertility be affected by the removal of ..... minerals and the storage and drying out of the soil before the rehabilitation process. Question- Can you unscramble an egg?”

“Listen to the growers, not the miners. Look at what has gone wrong with other projects and understand that whatever ‘protections’ are put in place, there is no way to get back what was there before.”

“I have worked with our soils for 30 years. I know the impact of disturbance. I have relied on our water table for 30 years. I know how small changes e.g. plantations can affect it..... We need skilled objective honest science and to appreciate the level of risk involved in this decision.”

“We have many concerns, but the main one is the unknown outcome of the soils after the mining takes place..... We are in a proven prime agricultural area that is a leading contributor of income for South Australian Government.”

“If there are continued problems ten or more years later will [the company] or government compensate farmers for the cost of their land at the current price at the time?”



## MINING TENEMENT ASSESSMENT PROCESS

### Stage 1 – Mining applications

Mining applications and assessments must follow these steps:

#### 1.1 Mining applicant engages with the community

Before a mining application is submitted, the applicant must give stakeholders the opportunity to provide input on the proposed environmental outcomes. Details of this consultation must be included in the application.

#### 1.2 Mining applicant prepares its application for a mining lease

The application is then submitted to the DEM for assessment.

#### 1.3 DEM assesses whether the application meets minimum legislative requirements

The application must meet these requirements to be accepted for assessment.

#### 1.4 The application is released for public comment and technical assessment

DEM will undertake a public consultation process and may engage with other government agencies.

**Response from the company** – After consultation, DEM may request the applicant to respond to issues raised by government and the public. If so, the applicant must prepare a response document.

**Response document lodged** – DEM performs a comprehensive assessment and may request more information from the applicant.

#### 1.5 DEM completes its assessment then prepares an assessment report and recommendation

The applicant must have adequately demonstrated its ability to achieve the proposed environmental outcomes.

#### 1.6 Decision to refuse or grant application

If a mining lease is granted, the operation must comply with terms and conditions on an ongoing basis and must comply with any other legislative operations which apply to the tenement.

Any proponent wanting to apply for a mining lease (ML) must specify their proposed post-mining land use (rehabilitation) outcomes ie what they plan to achieve with rehabilitation during and after operations (see Mining Tenement Assessment Process). Proponents must engage with stakeholders, including local communities, when developing these proposed outcomes.

To increase transparency around this process and ensure suitable levels of engagement have occurred, this report details several recommendations that apply to steps 1.1 and 1.2 in the mining tenement assessment process.

As an additional safeguard to ensure adequate engagement on critical environmental outcomes, step 1.4 - *The application is released for public comment and technical assessment* - allows interested parties to add additional comments or raise concerns if they feel their perspectives have not been considered.

#### Relevant recommendations:

Recommendation 1 – Scoping

Recommendation 3 – Community consultative committees

Recommendation 4 – Issues register

Recommendation 5 - Transparency



## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS/NATIVE FLORA AND FAUNA (33%)

Concerns about the potential environmental impact of operations were top of mind for many respondents (33%). Respondents mentioned negative impacts on air quality, soil, water, wildlife, native vegetation, and generalised landscape and climate impacts.

“It won’t be good for the environment, or good for our business. This type of mining is hugely detrimental to the environment, soil structure, landscape topography, carbon stores, water aquifers and wildlife.”

“Contamination of our environment - air, water, soils. Potential loss of water and food security. Concerned about biosecurity, the negative effect on land prices and our livelihood, negative effect on tourism, loss of our natural capital and assets, loss of soil carbon that has already been sequestered.”

“Loss of beautiful landscape and clean environment. Strip mining would wipe out large tracts of farmland that previously included native vegetation. So, we are concerned for all Australians about loss of wildlife and habitat.”

“The damage to the iconic redgums of the Limestone Coast, risks to the soil and rehabilitation of mined land, compensation, and environmental degradation if rehabilitation is not undertaken correctly. They are all issues that relate to the long-term health of firstly the environment but secondly, I take the moral view that we are custodians of the land and should leave where possible the planet in better shape than we found it, does this mine do that?”



This issue is closely correlated with:  
lack of trust in the effectiveness of  
rehabilitation

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potential impacts to the aquifer and  
waterways

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uncertainty about the effectiveness  
of mitigations/controls to reduce  
unforeseen impacts.

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Similar to **Lack of trust in rehabilitation process/Damage to soil (35%)**, this report's recommendations and the additional transparency they will bring to the regulatory process should ensure a greater level of certainty and clarity for any concerned community members. It will also highlight the opportunities for them to have their say as part of any formal application processes.

**Relevant recommendations:**

Recommendation 1 – Scoping

Recommendation 3 – Community  
consultative committees

Recommendation 4 – Issues register

Recommendation 5 – Transparency





## REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY (26%), REGIONAL ECONOMIC DAMAGE (26%), LAND VALUES (13%)

As potential impacts of a mining or energy project, these issues relate to the area's social context and can be categorised as complex social interactions. Under Part 10 of the [Mining Regulations 2020](#), their existence makes it both important and appropriate for a company to undertake **Scoping**.

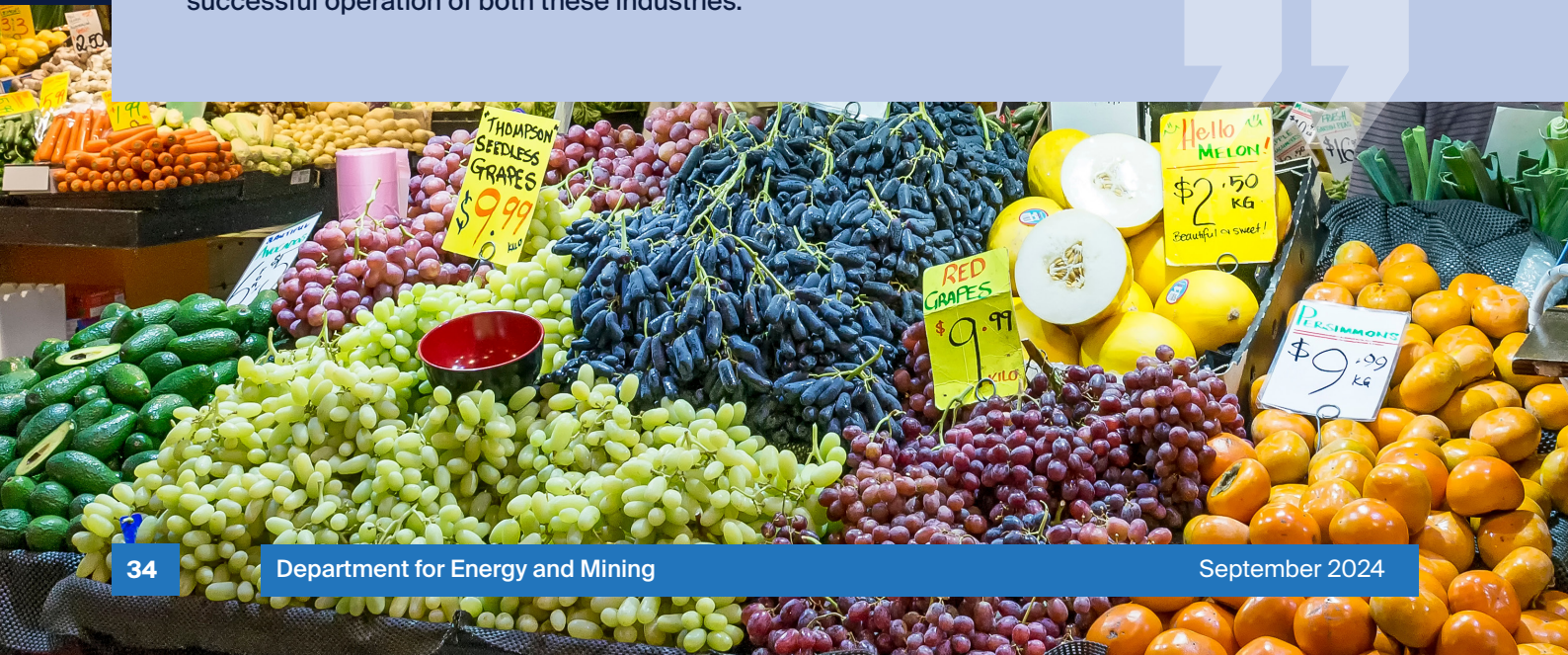
“These issues are the EXACT CONDITIONS TO GROW FOOD. LSC is 2% of SA’s land mass and we produce 48% of the states GDP. We simply cannot coexist.”

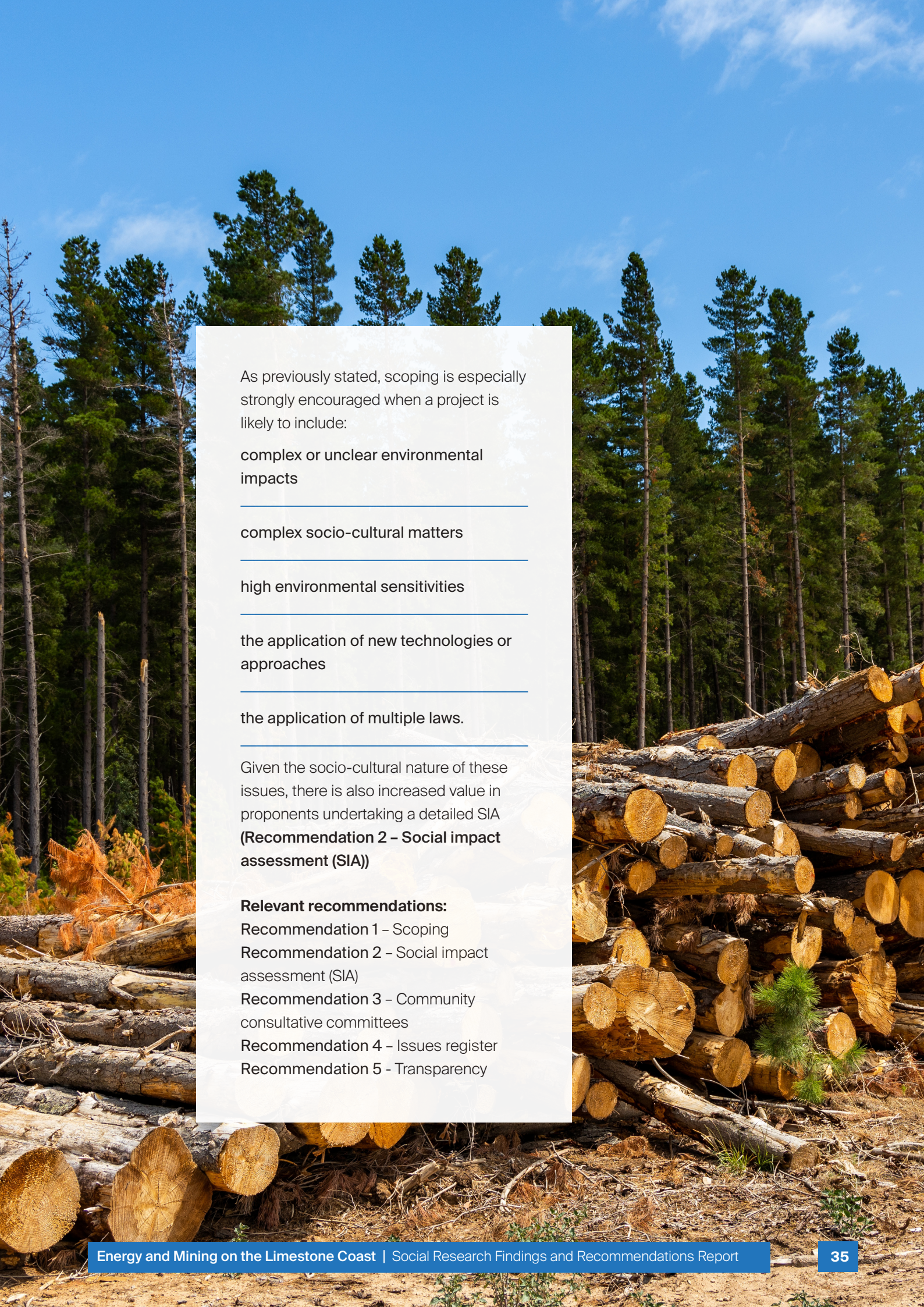
“If you go ahead with this you will obliterate agriculture in South Australia. Climate change is making it drier, even in the wettest part of the state. We should be preserving our most productive agriculture land, not absolutely destroying it.”

“Property values will plummet knowing mining leases hang over the area. Our cave systems are delicate and mining puts these at risk. Quality of life will be heavily impacted for those nearby these operations.”

“Mining in South Australia is important to the economy and will continue to be so. We need to find a balance between mining and other important land uses, particularly in a changing climate environment, it is vital to preserve productive land in reliable rainfall areas. I see no benefits to the local area long-term from this project going ahead.”

“The agricultural and forestry industries within the proposed mining area make an extremely valuable contribution to the local and state economies. They have existed here for generations and will continue to provide essential commodities and produce to both local and export markets. Any attempt to add a mining operation into this area can only result in a substantial reduction in the successful operation of both these industries.”





As previously stated, scoping is especially strongly encouraged when a project is likely to include:

complex or unclear environmental impacts

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complex socio-cultural matters

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high environmental sensitivities

---

the application of new technologies or approaches

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the application of multiple laws.

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Given the socio-cultural nature of these issues, there is also increased value in proponents undertaking a detailed SIA (**Recommendation 2 – Social impact assessment (SIA)**)

**Relevant recommendations:**

Recommendation 1 – Scoping

Recommendation 2 – Social impact assessment (SIA)

Recommendation 3 – Community consultative committees

Recommendation 4 – Issues register

Recommendation 5 – Transparency



## SHOULD HAPPEN SOMEWHERE ELSE (23%)

Mineral exploration, quarrying and mining in South Australia is strictly regulated. Explorers and miners must meet strict conditions to apply for licences, enter land and perform any related activities.

“Why not pick a place that hasn’t got such a delicate profile above a water source. Western districts Victoria has a bluestone barrier that is borderline impenetrable... why not go there?”

“I think we need to explore more arid areas for mining, where little to no income is generated and leave the high producing agricultural areas to continue to contribute to our economy and community.”

“I think state revenue will benefit. I think the world needs resources to fight the environmental challenges we face; however, we need to balance the impact this has on the community and productivity of a region and the environment. This is not the place!!!!”

“Govt needs to THINK where their money comes from now...and do more for agriculture....they can have mining elsewhere but not in this productive area....The Naracoorte Caves WORLD HERITAGE AREA is not far from it either. Mining should be banned there.”

“I feel that the southeast is too populated and both environmentally, socially, and economically fragile to introduce this particular type of mining. The disruption to families and communities is a big risk. The potential damage to future production and generations needs to be taken into account.”



A quarry or mine will only be approved if the company can demonstrate, during the application and approvals process, that they can appropriately limit their environmental and social impacts and meet the [Terms of Reference](#) for their specific project.

Companies wanting to operate on the Limestone Coast should be considering the key issues outlined in this report. Scoping and SIA, as outlined in Recommendation 1 – Scoping and Recommendation 2 – Social impact assessment (SIA), will ensure they are aware of issues and can develop any potential projects in a way that is sensitive to the operating environment.

Setting up a community consultative committee (Recommendation 3 – Community consultative committees) and increasing transparency (Recommendation 5 – Transparency) will ensure these processes are more transparent and clear to stakeholders. This should be done in a timely manner and made easily accessible on the company’s website.

DEM has a variety of guidance documents and further reading for interested parties, including community members, who often seek more information on the following topics:

[Land access and landowner rights](#)

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[Landowner rental distributions](#)

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[Consultation and engagement](#)

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[Mineral exploration - Exempt land, Notices, Compensation, Landowner support, Multiple land use framework, Defence land, Conservation](#)

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[Responses to common enquiries](#)

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**Relevant recommendations:**

Recommendation 1 – Scoping

Recommendation 2 – Social impact assessment (SIA)

Recommendation 3 – Community consultative committees

Recommendation 5 – Transparency





## MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS (12%)

12% of respondents raised the impact that energy and mining projects could have, or in some cases are already having, on the mental health and wellbeing of residents in impacted areas.

“I would urge that serious efforts be made to ensure that the mental health of the affected communities be given a high priority throughout all stages of this process, not only if it eventually comes to pass. The stress on farming families in relation to this matter is already considerable.”

“100% without a doubt. It already has affected the mental health of my parents with the threat of destroying their healthy soils they have cultivated over the last 30 years, as well as the unique environment, and their livelihood.”

“People in offices don’t understand the turmoil, stress, angst, financial pressure, environmental devastation etc. that this would cause to farmers.”

“It will bring no benefit to local area at all and will only cause financial loss and stress to anyone who lives in the affected area.”



Respondents mentioned the following key influencing factors:

The stress of not knowing what the impacts of potential projects will/could be.

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The time and effort burden on residents to educate themselves about the processes involved and their rights on issues such as land access.

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A lack of trust in both companies and the government to protect their livelihoods and way of life.

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A feeling of powerlessness about project development in their area.

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DEM's commitments outlined in this report and the recommendations for proponents take these issues into account:

The recommendations for proponents to undertake early scoping and SIA work, and to increase transparency and engagement levels, will hopefully address perceptions of a lack of clear and accurate information.

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Recommendations such as the formation of CCC groups should give interested stakeholders a greater sense of control and empowerment.

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This report and associated recommendations are designed to ensure community members feel heard and demonstrate DEM's commitment to respond in a meaningful way to their concerns.

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DEM's commitments to improved communication, education materials and staff stationed in the area are designed to increase transparency, reduce the burden on communities to find and interpret information for themselves, and make it easier to communicate with the department.

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The commitment to ensure DEM staff are present, visible and accessible to the Limestone Coast community should facilitate relationships between DEM and the community, and build trust in the regulatory process.

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**Relevant recommendations:**

- Recommendation 1 – Scoping
- Recommendation 2 – Social impact assessment (SIA)
- Recommendation 3 – Community consultative committees
- Recommendation 5 – Transparency



## INTERACTIONS WITH COMPANY REPRESENTATIVES (11%)

It is critical that companies planning any energy or mining project engage with communities in an effective and meaningful way.

DEM is clear that we prioritise suitable and respectful engagement with impacted stakeholders, including community members. Information on this position is available on our website. Our position aligns with the South Australian government's Better Together Principles and is specified in documents such as [MG4 Land access and engagement](#) and on our website: [Consultation and engagement](#)

“Engagement has been severely mishandled, which is creating a greater divide between the company and impacted landholders.”

“I would like to be involved in the engagement process however the company is not allowing this to occur.”

“Direct questions were asked ..... and answers were not forth coming.”

Establishing a community consultative committee is a powerful tool to help companies build trust and demonstrate commitment to meaningfully engage with community. Examples of South Australian community consultative committees are detailed in Table 4.3 on this page: [Mining compliance | Energy & Mining \(energymining.sa.gov.au\)](#)

### Relevant recommendations:

**Recommendation 3** – Community consultative committees

**Recommendation 4** – Issues register

**Recommendation 5** - Transparency

STAKEHOLDERS



## REGULATORY RIGOUR/ENFORCEMENT (10%)

Survey responses indicate that there is low trust in DEM's ability or motivation to ensure companies' compliance with relevant legislation. Respondents lack confidence in and understanding of how the legislation protects impacted communities and environments.

“We have been informed in the media about strip mining in the state that has not been effectively regulated by DEM. We have also heard first-hand from a farmers' perspective of the inability of DEM to manage the process.”

“Talking with other people who have mines already on their property and learning how slow the DEM is to act without the threat of legal action or strong media intervention.”

“Probably because they are pro mining / pro-development rather than pro agriculture / pro-environment.”

“They are a government run organisation and aren't living in farming region, so they don't understand.”

“DEM has failed to demonstrate so far it's ability to stop exploration mining in the area.”

“I am concerned that the same department is the department that hands out mining licenses, regulates these companies and arbitrates when there is conflict between land holder's and miners. All under an Act that is over 50 years old with very few amendments since then. The world is a different place now and society requires mining companies to behave a lot more respectfully than they have in the past.”

When asked about levels of confidence in DEMs ability to effectively regulate, more than half the respondents indicated they were 'Not confident at all' (56%) and a further 25% indicated they were 'Fairly unconfident'.

When asked to describe why respondents felt this way, they indicated a range of issues:

Concerns about the amount of power DEM has to enforce compliance.

Whether DEM has the willingness/ motivation to enforce its powers.

Whether the powers available are fit for purpose in the local area.

A perceived lack of impartiality or bias towards energy and mining project over the concerns of communities or individuals.

### How confident are you in DEM's ability to effectively regulate mining operations to minimise your concerns? (n = 149)

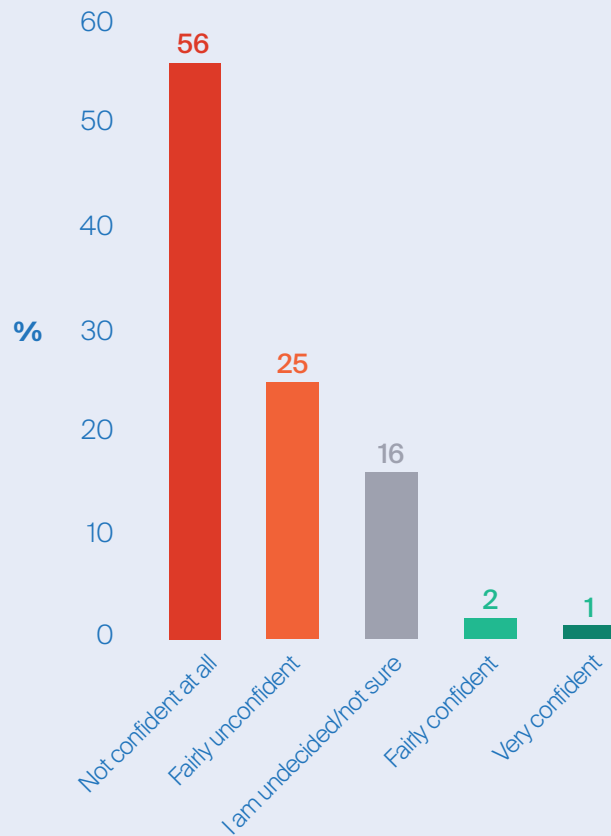


Figure 9 Confidence in effective regulation.

### Why do you feel this way about DEM's ability to effectively regulate against your concerns? (n = 149)

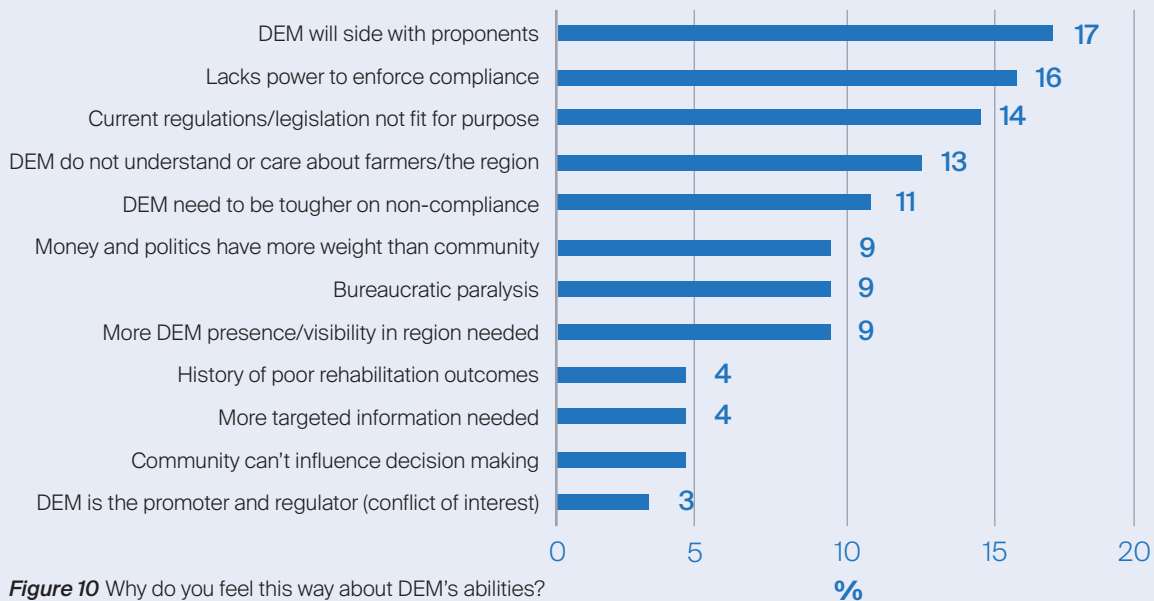


Figure 10 Why do you feel this way about DEM's abilities?

When comparing why respondents felt the way they did with the level of confidence they had in DEM's ability to effectively regulate the key concerns related to:

**a perceived lack of information (25%)**

**lack of DEM visibility in the local area (21%)**

**a perception that DEM will side with proponents (21%).**

For respondents who are 'fairly unconfident' in DEMs ability, the focus is much more on the perception that DEM will side with proponents (30%), and a perception that the current legislation is not fit for purpose for the local area (22%). This relates to the idea that the Mining Act is better suited to locations with less dense populations, fewer interactions with existing industry and less environmentally sensitive areas.

The largest group of respondents - those who are not confident at all in DEMs ability to effectively regulate - 56% of respondents - the focus is very much on a perceived lack of power to enforce compliance (24%), and the legislation's lack of suitability for the location (16%).

### How confident are you in DEM's ability to effectively regulate mining operations to minimise your concerns? by DEM Regulation Issues (n = 149)

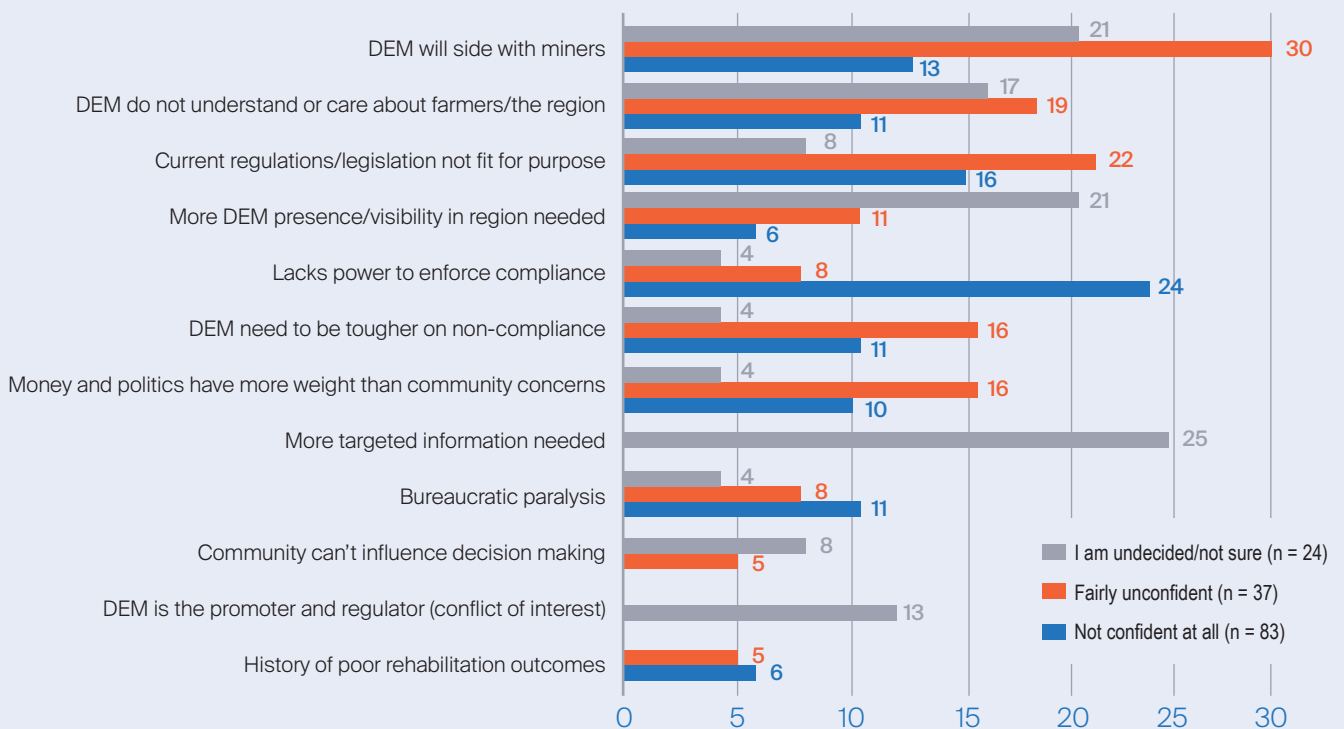


Figure 11 Level of confidence in DEM's ability to effectively regulate.

While part of DEM's role is to unlock the value and opportunities offered by the state's energy and mineral resources, it is also our role to ensure this happens in a responsible and sustainable way that:

**minimises harm to the environment and the public**

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**ensures all South Australians benefit through royalties reinvested into state infrastructure, jobs, regional business growth and other mechanisms**

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**supports consistent, secure outcomes for mining companies.**

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Mining and quarrying companies are expected to understand their role in:

**minimising their environmental and community impact**

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**mining in a safe and efficient manner**

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**engaging with stakeholders**

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**rehabilitating land progressively throughout operations and after completion.**

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The recently amended (2021) Mining Act provides a contemporary legislative framework that addresses the principles listed above. DEM is now equipped with a leading practice suite of regulatory tools that supports proactive regulation through transparency, leading indicators, scoping provisions, SIAs, EIAs and a rigorous compliance framework.

Learn more:

[Mining Act regulation, compliance and enforcement policy](#)

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[Transparency policy](#)

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As projects progress from exploration and feasibility studies to operations, and their impact on communities and the environment increases, our regulatory controls and legislative requirements become more stringent to ensure we minimise harm.

DEM will enforce the Act and use our regulatory tools to support good practice operations, prevent some of the less optimal practices of previous generations and alleviate many community concerns.

# CONCLUSION

The regulation and legislation that governs the energy and mining industries is designed to ensure transparency and fairness. One of DEM's core functions and departmental responsibilities is ensuring communities understand their rights, have a voice, are listened to and respected, and able to influence decision-making on projects that impact them.

The **Recommendations and DEM Commitments** in this report have been developed with consideration of everything we have heard from the Limestone Coast community and are a response based on our understanding of the concerns raised.

They are designed to increase the level of visibility for community about things that may impact them, to demonstrate responsiveness from DEM to concerns raised, and to strengthen our relationships with impacted stakeholders.

Community feedback, like that in this survey, is critical to help DEM implement the relevant regulatory tools and practices in a way that results in outcomes that benefit all stakeholders and will help us to ensure we are regulating the industry in a way which meets community expectations.

If you have any feedback on this report or suggestions for future improvements please feel free to email:

[DEM.Engagement@sa.gov.au](mailto:DEM.Engagement@sa.gov.au)

An aerial photograph of a large agricultural field, possibly a sugarcane plantation, with rows of crops stretching across the landscape. A dirt road runs through the field, and a line of trees separates different sections. The sky is clear and blue. A quote is overlaid on the image in white text.

“ One of DEM’s core functions and departmental responsibilities is ensuring communities understand their rights, have a voice, are listened to and respected ”



# Further information

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### Acknowledgement of Country

As guests here on Kurna land, the Department for Energy and Mining (DEM) acknowledges everything this department does impacts on Aboriginal country, the sea, the sky, its people, and the spiritual and cultural connections which have existed since the first sunrise. Our responsibility is to share our collective knowledge, recognise a difficult history, respect the relationships made over time, and create a stronger future. We are ready to walk, learn and work together.

Front cover image: Robe Obelisk during sunrise while viewed from the walking trail, Limestone Coast, South Australia



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